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The study of awareness and capability of primary school teachers in identifying students with learning disability in the province of Kermanshah

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Abstract

This study attempted to investigate the awareness teachers in identifying children with learning disabilities. In this Descriptive research, 291 teachers of primary school were selected by multi-stage sampling. Data analyzed with t-test, Pearson Correlation showed that more than 50 percent of teachers have appropriate knowledge to the nature of learning disability and 82/1 have awareness of etiology learning disability. Finally more than 90 percent of teachers had not acceptable ability in identifying students with learning disorders. There are significant differences between gender and level teaching of teachers with the knowledge of the etiology learning disabilities.

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1. Introduction

Learning disability is one of the most complicated disorders introduced to the area of psychology and teaching of exceptional children. Despite having normal IQ and not having any kinds of physical or emotional problems, children with learning disability suffer from learning disorders and their educational and learning performance are considerably different from what is expected from them (Corck 2003, qtd. In Bander, 2011). Many of these students become disappointed because they fail to succeed in their education and eventually quit school early. Furthermore, if their problems are not recognized and suitable interfering programs are not provided, the risk of some disorders like depression, anxiety and delinquency increases for these children (Trute et al 2008).

The prevalence of learning disabilities in different regions of the world is estimated from 3 to 12 percent and teachers, who have classes of 20 to 25 students in each, may have at least one, two or more students with learning disabilities (Hallahan et al 2005). The estimation of learning disability in the population of school children ranges from the lowest estimation about 2% to the highest estimation about 20-40% (Mercer and Powlen 2011). Therefore,

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due to the abundance and prevalence of students with learning disabilities at schools- mainly primary schools- it seems necessary for primary school teachers to be increasingly familiar with the learning disability phenomenon more than other teachers and be able to identify these kinds of students in their classes via the scientific criteria and in the most favorable manner (Solis et al 2011). As the executives of educational programs at schools, teachers have two important roles: firstly, they play the most outstanding and important role in children's learning and secondly, they are the providers and makers of an educational environment for students' learning. In this regard, in addition to the familiarity of teachers with educational methods, their awareness of problems and educational and behavioral insufficiency of children is of great importance (Niknami, 1999).

Due to abundance of students with learning disability in every school (mainly primary school) and the possibility of the existence of one or several children with learning disability (incapable of reading, writing, spelling, calculating and etc.) in each class, school authorities - especially primary school teachers- are required to be familiar with learning disabilities more than others in order to identify these kinds of students in their class and take appropriate and timely educational and rehabilitation measures (Osmen 2008, Jitendra 2011). In line with this, Jeromy (2007) emphasized the role of informed and experienced teacher in identifying students with learning disabilities and in making improvements in their performance. Furthermore, he identified the level of teacher's awareness as effective in recognition, education and prevention of this disorder. In case the teachers are familiar with different types of children's learning problems, especially learning disability, they can evaluate students with a scientific and conscious perspective and select educational methods and solutions commensurate with problem type and student's characteristic that subsequently leads to the avoidance of many problems. Gersten et. al. (2005) revealed in one research that there's a significantly positive relationship between the skill improvements of students with learning disabilities and their teachers' level of awareness. In other words, by recognizing these students and employing particular educational methods for teaching this group of students, the informed teachers provide a lot of improvements in the students' performance and skill. In this regard, Doris and Helmer (2005) emphasized that the teachers' attitude and high level of awareness about learning disabilities make the timely diagnosis of this disorder possible. Due to the importance of learning, the significant role of teachers and educating students with learning disabilities and also teachers' awareness of this issue, timely diagnosis of this problem and employing correct educational and psychological strategies, this article attempts at identifying the capability of primary school teachers in the province of Kermanshah in identifying students with learning disability. These kinds of data can prepare the required ground for offering some practical suggestions with the purpose of problem control and management.

2. Method

The present study is descriptive in terms of data collection and practical in terms of purpose. The statistical population of the present study is all of the primary school teachers of the province of Kermanshah (Iran). The 291 persons of the population were chosen by multi-stage sampling (108 male teachers and 176 female ones).

2.1. Instrument

In this research, the 45 question scale that has made by researchers was used in which the internal consistency coefficient equals 0.88 that shows a high level of the instrument's internal consistency. Furthermore, the instrument of the present research is approved by the masters and scholars of this field of study.

3. Tables

Most of important results of this research are included in following tables. Distributional data about the nature of learning disorders will be presented in table number 1.

Table 1. Distributional data about the nature of learning disorders

Scores	Frequency	Percent frequency	Percent compression
10	3	1.0	1.0
11	2	0.8	1.8
12	1	0.3	2.1
13	4	1.4	3.5
14	9	3.1	6.6
15	16	5.5	12.1
16	31	10.7	22.8
17	53	18.2	41.0
18	62	21.3	62.3
19	47	16.2	78.5
20	35	12.0	90.5
21	22	7.6	98.1
22	2	0.8	98.9
23	2	0.8	99.7
24	1	0.3	100
Total	291	100	

As table 1 show, the most frequency of the knowledge about nature of learning disorders is about 18 (%21.3). The highest score is 24 and lowest score is 10. Standard deviation score 42/2 and the average is 74/17. Accordingly, it can be found that about 50 percent of sample has grade three standard deviations above the mean. In other words, knowledge about nature of learning disorders in the groups is high and acceptable. Distributional scores about the etiology of learning disorders will be presented in table number 2.

Table 2. Distributional scores about the etiology of learning disorders

Scores	Frequency	Percent frequency	Percent compression
3	1	0.3	0.3
4	4	1.4	1.7
5	2	0.7	2.4
6	3	1.0	3.3
7	26	8.9	12.4
8	47	16.2	28.5
9	43	14.8	43.3
10	59	20.3	63.6
11	54	18.6	82.1
12	32	11.0	93.1
13	15	5.2	98.3
14	4	1.4	99.7
15	1	0.3	100
Total	291	100	

As table 2 shows, the highest score is 15 and the lowest score is 3. As can be seen in table 2, the highest frequency is assigned to a score 10. According to the percentage of comparison, %82.1 of sample has grade score above 10. Distributional data about the diagnosis of learning disorders will be presented in table number 3.

Table 3. Distributional scores about diagnosis of learning disorders

Scores	Frequency	Percent frequency	Percent compression
1	74	25.4	25.4
2	53	18.2	43.6

3	56	19.2	62.8
4	64	21.9	84.8
5	17	5.8	90.7
6	9	3.09	93.8
7	10	3.43	97.2
8	4	1.37	98.6
9	1	0.34	98.9
10	3	1.03	100
Total	291	100	

As table 3 shows, the highest frequency in diagnosis and identification of learning disorders is related to a score of 1 (%25.4) and lowest frequency is related to a score of 9 (%0.34). On the other hand, More than 90 percent of teachers in identifying students with learning disorders do not have abilities. The correlation coefficients of different variables with the teachers' knowledge about etiology of learning disorders will be presented in table number 4.

Table 4. The correlation coefficients of different variables with the teachers' knowledge about etiology of learning disorders

Predictive Variables	B	Standard error	β	t	P
Fixed	11.18	0.81	-	13.77	0.001
Gender	-0.43	0.22	-0.11	-1.89	0.05
Age	0.001	0.001	-0.01	-0.26	0.78
educational degree	-0.32	0.16	-0.11	-1.93	0.05
Field	0.12	0.07	0.09	1.59	0.11
work experience	-0.02	0.01	-0.08	-1.38	0.16
level teaching	0.10	0.06	0.10	1.65	0.10
income	0.001	0.001	0.10	1.75	0.08

As can be seen in table 4, the relationship between gender and educational level of teachers with knowledge of the etiology of learning disorders is a significant ($p=0.05$).

4. Conclusion

The present research showed that more than 50% of teachers under study got scores that are 3 standard deviations more than average. In other words, the awareness about the nature of learning disability was high and they achieved an acceptable score. the teachers are believed to have a suitable awareness about the nature of learning disability. In line with these results, in a research conducted for evaluating the capability of teachers in the area of learning disability, Stanwich and Gordan (1998) understood that 74.1% of teachers and 42.6% of primary school managers of one of the cities in Canada had a favorable belief and awareness about the nature of learning disability. This result was in compliance with the research Gertson et. al. (2005). These findings were consistent with the studies done by Rojalili (2008). It seems that both the teachers with appropriate awareness about students with learning disability and those without such awareness should make an effort to increase their knowledge about learning disability and this important matter cannot be achieved without an accurate plan and authorities' support. In addition, the findings of the present study have revealed that 82.1% of teachers achieved a score higher than 10 for awareness of learning disability etiology. In other words, they mainly had an agreeable opinion and identified the proposed reasons for the incidence of learning disability as important. The reasons suggested were mainly genetic, institutional, cognitive, familial and etc. Otherwise stated, teachers are said to have a high percentage (82.1%) of knowledge and acceptable information about the cause and etiology of learning disability. That is to say the teachers recognized the genetic factors as the most effective factor (19.7%) and alcohol and drug consumption as the least effective factor (0.3%) in the incidence of learning disability. Therefore the teachers under study are considered to have an acceptable knowledge about the factors producing learning disability. These findings were in agreement with the results of Jeromey (2007) who revealed that the teachers have a good knowledge about the nature of learning disability. On the contrary, Fatahi Andbil (2007) proved in one research that teachers in most cases don't have an appropriate awareness of the cause and nature of learning disability. Therefore, in accordance with the

findings of the present study and all other evidence, teachers are offered to gain more knowledge about the etiology of learning disability, take more successful actions in the interpersonal relationship skill and also in instruction, rehabilitation, and timely identification of these students. Also findings showed that a high percentage of teachers don't have a satisfactory capability in identifying students with learning disability. In other words, 90% of teachers under study don't have the required knowledge and capability in identifying and diagnosing students with learning disability. In compliance with the results of the present study, Bandar et. al. (1995) and Doris and Helmer (2005) in their separate studies understood that teachers don't have the ability of and appropriate knowledge about identifying students with learning disabilities.

Other findings of the study showed there are significant differences between gender and level teaching of teachers with the knowledge of the etiology learning disabilities.

Generally, the results of the present study revealed that the level of teachers' awareness of nature and etiology of learning disability was adequate and satisfactory but the level of teachers' capability in identifying and recognizing students with learning disability was at a low and inadequate level. Therefore, due to the importance of this issue and the results of the present study and other experimental evidence, it is necessary for primary school teachers to be more familiar with students with special learning disability and be more favorably capable of identification and recognition of these kinds of students in their class in order to prevent the incidence of further mental and social damage by adopting particular educational, rehabilitation and treatment methods based upon the personal needs of the student. This important issue undoubtedly cannot be accomplished without increasing the knowledge of trainers, teachers and parents who have the most effective relationship with the students and without the support of education and training authorities and programmers and other entities and related organizations.

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